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President: Mr. Razali Ismail (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda Item 9 (continued)

General debate

The President: The first speaker is the Chairman of the delegation of Djibouti, Mr. Roble Olhaye, on whom I now call.

Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti): My delegation offers its warmest congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at what will certainly be a crucial session. We have come to know you over the years, and have never failed to admire and appreciate your relentless activism, plain-speaking and valuable contributions. We have no doubt that your unique experience, coupled with your keen awareness of the issues on which we will have to deliberate, augur well for a most productive session.

We also wish to record our gratitude to Mr. Freitas do Amaral, the outgoing President, for his direction and focused leadership during the historic fiftieth anniversary session. Much of the pace and progress in United Nations reform efforts and activities this year are largely due to his commitment to achieving a meaningful and balanced outcome on this difficult issue.

We would also like to commend the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for the perseverance and dedication with which he has undertaken his duties.

Saddled as it is with diminishing resources and increasing uncertainty regarding its role and mandate, the United Nations is going through trying times. The Secretary-General, however, has, against all odds, maintained the continuity and functioning of the Secretariat, tackling the daily challenges facing mankind.

My delegation, in conformity with the decision and recommendation of the League of Arab States and the Organization of African Unity, supports the re-election bid of the Secretary-General for another term in order to enable him to accomplish the objectives of his mission.

Fifty years ago, with great energy, grand vision and a considerable measure of optimism, the world embarked upon a high-minded journey to end the scourge of war, eliminate poverty and create a world of freedom and justice for all. Much has been accomplished, and it cannot be denied that humankind now has the power and resources to achieve the goals we set ourselves.

Yet too many dreams remain shattered, too much potential remains unfulfilled, and too many conflicts remain in too many parts of the globe. The United Nations is bracing itself for more turbulent times ahead, with bankruptcy on the horizon as it confronts the threat to either "reform or perish". Remarkably, there is a placid air of "business as usual" pervading this session of the General Assembly — a dream state in which all is well and normal. Given the dire predicament threatening the existence of this Organization, does this reveal a measure of resignation? Is this the beginning of the end of the



enthusiastic hope for a new world order with which this decade began? Does this explain why so many opportunities to address the pressing problems of our day have not been realized? While politically the world might be in a state of flux and transition, economically, however, it has enjoyed an unprecedented level of output — enough for every man, woman and child on this planet to enjoy a happy and secure life.

The vast majority of the people of the world, however, have received minimal benefit. The facts are foreboding. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) informs us that over the last decade income levels in some 70 developing countries were lower than in the 1960s or 1970s. The Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme tellingly reminds us that the belief that the developing world is doing very much better is one of the great myths of the present. In fact, three fifths of the world's population live in poverty, millions are forced to migrate every year, and 15 per cent suffer from chronic hunger and malnutrition. All this is taking place while world food production and reserves are declining in the face of population growth. As most of us realize, much of this stagnation is taking place in Africa.

For all the oft-cited reasons — historical, colonial or contemporary — Africa has been lagging behind on the march to self-sustaining growth. Consequently, 50 per cent of its peoples live in poverty, with a quality of life that is not expected to improve during this decade. While the increasing flow of negative statistics on Africa tends to mask the substantial efforts for reform, pluralization and structural adjustment that are taking place in many countries on the continent, for most people the situation is life-threatening.

There are, however, a few hopeful signs that the extent of Africa's predicament has begun to draw the critical attention it needs from the international community. In particular, the 10-year United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, launched in March by the Secretary-General, deserves a special mention. Although it does not represent new funding so much as the more efficient use of available resources, it should prove useful.

Together with this initiative, the formal endorsement last week by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, during their annual meeting in Washington, of a plan to substantially reduce the debt burden of the world's poorest and most heavily indebted nations, most of which are in Africa, is very encouraging. If current economic reform measures are to have the

desired impact, debt relief is crucial, particularly in reversing Africa's increasing marginalization.

But problems of degradation, poverty and underdevelopment are hardly unique to Africa; they are found in every corner of the world, and must be seriously addressed if we are to rectify the frightening pace of global polarization, both within and between countries. According to the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, we are creating a planet that, increasingly, is not one world but two.

For all these reasons, the World Food Summit in Rome next month, and the designation of the decade 1997-2006 as the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty will provide the international community with an opportunity to renew its commitment realistically to face those twin scourges of humankind. The conventional wisdom of today argues that the basic remedy for underdevelopment lies in embracing free and open market economies, stimulated by private capital. To this end, the bulk of the world is engaged in restructuring to fit this mould. But with the dramatic shrinkage of the resources needed for transitional development — particularly those for official development assistance — self-sufficiency has become an almost impossible task. Compounding this dilemma, total private investment has quadrupled since 1990, but only in ways that bypass most developing countries and fail to address their problems.

The world remains laden with conflicts. It has been said that as many as 25 complex emergencies now threaten tens of millions of people worldwide every year, that the convulsions are becoming larger, with wider repercussions, and that this new generation of crises will continue until their underlying causes are properly addressed. Cold-war identities have lost relevance, and old identities and animosities have resurfaced. Many nation States have lost considerable cohesion and are being buffeted by external pressures and strains within. The consequent void of economic and political instability has provided an opening for many unscrupulous, self-proclaimed "leaders" who, hungry for power, are reigniting the myths, latent prejudices, hatreds and fears lying in the dark recesses of so many minds. Employing violence, propaganda and intimidation, such as we have seen in Bosnia, Somalia, Cambodia and elsewhere, they have successfully pitted peoples against peoples. The predictable result has been an explosion in the number of armed conflicts, accompanied by widespread devastation, both human and physical, gross violations of human rights, and "ethnic cleansing". This is a situation

increasingly in need of concerted international action and a strong, focused and impartial United Nations.

The United Nations has, indeed, responded positively in many instances. Cambodia and Mozambique are cases in point. Some crises, however, have proved intractable, invariably because of the nature of mandates or the political will of Member States, whose changing views and policies have affected the prospects for early resolution. Had the international community acted with dispatch in crisis situations, countless lives could have been saved and scarce resources conserved by forcing the belligerents to disarm unconditionally and to respect the rule of law.

The widespread and indiscriminate use of anti-personnel mines in many conflict situations has been consistently devastating. We therefore welcome the Security Council statement of 30 August 1996 indicating the high priority being given to demining. The effectiveness of peacekeeping will be greatly enhanced by making demining an integral part of it. Sadly, however, these commendable measures will continue to fall short of what is required unless the international community imposes a moratorium, if not a total ban, on the manufacture and deployment of such devices. In the same vein, we hope that the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty will provide an impetus to increased international cooperation, in addition to marking a first viable step towards the total elimination of weapons of mass destruction.

The problems, conflicts and challenges of development and international cooperation are growing in complexity. Not surprisingly, therefore, as so many have noted, the United Nations system needs to be renewed and enabled to respond to these simultaneous challenges.

Over the past two years, and particularly in the first half of this year, a number of High-level Open-ended Working Groups of the General Assembly have extensively explored and deliberated on issues of reform as they impinge upon the financial situation, the enlargement, composition and transparency of the Security Council, and the Secretariat and General Assembly. Considerable time, energy and resources have been expended in these efforts. However, differences persist among nations, reflecting divergent national policies, views and interests.

As might be expected, a proliferation of ideas and positions is emerging from individual countries, including, to name just a few, the United States, Italy, Belize and Malaysia, which have produced proposals and statements of position. Regional groups, including those in Africa, and

alliances and coalitions, including the Non-Aligned Movement, have their own positions. All of them are jockeying for position so as to advance and strengthen their individual or collective interests. The stalemate over Security Council reform is far from over and remains the toughest problem. The real stumbling block is the number and composition of the new permanent membership, which must include developing countries from all parts of the world, including Africa, Asia and Latin America. We must also recognize that constructive participation in the Council by many smaller States has demonstrated that the possession of large economies and large populations cannot be the exclusive criteria for permanent membership.

The tense circumstances persisting in a number of States in the Great Lakes region of Africa is a cause of concern to my country. This is true of Rwanda, where bloated prisons, camps swollen with refugees and the slow pace of the judicial process are just a few of the problems that continue to plague that country. The International Tribunal for Rwanda has begun to function, but with limited manpower and financial resources. The Tribunal must be seen to function effectively, as the message it sends is crucial to resolving the Rwandan problem.

In neighbouring Burundi, the international community remains haunted by the fear of a re-enactment of the horrors that took place in Rwanda over two years ago, where tens of thousands were massacred. There has already been a frightful human toll in Burundi since the army murdered the first democratically elected President in 1993, marking the advent of instability and violence. Should the army — the de facto head of State and supreme authority since 1993 — remain unprepared to accept the authority of a democratically elected civilian government, we may have a recipe for uncontrolled bloodshed. That is the real problem confronting the international community in resolving the Burundi debacle. Djibouti fully supports the efforts of the countries in the region in imposing sanctions, whose objective is to compel the new regime in Bujumbura to restore constitutional order and legality and to hand over power to a legitimately elected government.

With the explosion of violence in the territories occupied by Israel, we have witnessed an alarming deterioration in prospects for peace in the Middle East. The Israeli act of opening a tunnel under one of Islam's holiest shrines, the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem, was yet another example of disrespect for, as well as

defiance of, international opinion. But more importantly, it was yet another example of intransigent rule over East Jerusalem.

It is difficult to deny that the ultimate Israeli aim is to change the ground rules — in effect, unilaterally to redefine the peace process, thereby rolling back the clock and reversing years of hard work, concessions, sacrifice and good faith on the part of the previous Israeli Government, the Palestinians, the Arabs, and the international community. It is also disturbing that, while the world is watching, Israel should decide openly to pursue a policy of creating “facts on the ground” in total disregard of the principles established in Oslo, the Washington peace agreement and United Nations resolutions, all of which emphasize the return of occupied land in exchange for peace. It is little wonder that the current talks between Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Arafat, which began last week in Washington, have neither produced nor resolved anything. What we see instead are Israeli promises or commitments to keep talking to the Palestinians. But there has been neither an action nor a promise to implement what had already been agreed upon, or even to contemplate the start of final status negotiations.

The depth of Arab disillusionment is obvious. The hard line policies pursued by the new Government are simply fuelling fires of hatred and violence. Djibouti hopes that reason will prevail, and calls on key countries and regions to continue providing the necessary direction, leadership and reassurances for a return to previous commitments. Having come so far and sacrificed so much, and with so much at stake, we must not allow the peace process to drift or wither away. In this context, we also wish to underscore the urgent call of the Arab Summit in Cairo in June for Israel to resume the peace process within the framework of the Madrid Conference, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

We share the anxiety in the Gulf region about the state of the three islands of the United Arab Emirates that have been occupied by Iran, and we hope that this long-standing problem will be resolved peacefully.

Somalia continues to exist in a cycle of misery and political impasse, lacking structures, an economy, a stable civil society or legitimate authority. More disturbing, there is neither peace nor war, and clashes continue unabated. Mogadishu and its infamous warlords remain the maelstrom of Somalia. Despite almost five years of incessant fighting, there are no signs of compromise or reconciliation. The lust

for power of a few has resulted in disaster for the whole country, whose condition is now a virtual replica of what it was in the nineteenth century. There is simply nowhere to lay the blame for Somalia's wretched state except on the warlords and their inability to reason and reach agreement. This myopic vision of leadership seems unlikely to change until one faction prevails, and that may take years. Meanwhile, the people suffer, and the world is watching. Somalia, we must conclude, remains a festering tragedy, a piece of unfinished business for the international community, an international embarrassment, and a permanent problem. It will not go away simply because we refuse to address it, and it will certainly continue to be an indelible blemish on the Charter of the United Nations.

The sooner we consider the far-reaching implications of the situation of this failed State, which is absent from this Hall, the better it will be for the Somali people and the international community. Somalia is simply consumed by an interminable turmoil from which it cannot free itself. It needs help — our help.

With the holding of elections, the saga of Bosnia has reached a decisive juncture. The problem facing the international community is the attempts to obstruct the normalization process through the use of violence and intimidation, which increase the pressure for secession. However, one issue that is creating tremendous frustration and confusion is the reluctance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to apprehend the prime Bosnian Serb war crime suspects — Karadžić and Mladić — who are accused of instigating, planning and ordering the genocide and “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia. To date, 74 arrest warrants have been issued for suspected war criminals, but only eight people are in custody. This fact, perhaps, reflects a political decision; but it is a paradoxical one whose effects may be with us in Bosnia and beyond for a long time.

In conclusion, I wish to refer to an issue relating to my own part of the world. Our corner of the globe, the Horn of Africa, seems to be passing through a period of renewed optimism and revival. This must be sustained. With the regional economy slowly but steadily recovering from the effects of past turmoil, the need for enhanced cooperation cannot be overemphasized. Djibouti is umbilically linked to the pulse of its neighbours and cannot, therefore, be indifferent to their economic and trade realities.

The conflicts and civil strife that have plagued the Horn of Africa in the past two decades have had a devastating effect on our economic and social life. This can be readily observed in the unacceptable number of displaced persons and refugees in my small country, for whom our continued commitment to care is proving to be economically and socially overwhelming, if not disastrous.

Djibouti's approach to regional affairs is based on mutual respect, moderation and cooperation. We believe that all the countries in the Horn of Africa must together seek to resolve the common problems of poverty, conflict and underdevelopment, bilaterally and within the framework of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD), whose revitalization is crucial.

Djibouti is in the midst of economic restructuring and institutional reforms. Given the demobilization process that is now under way, we require generous assistance from the international donor community. Towards this end, we are planning to organize a round table early next year, under the aegis of the UNDP and the Bretton Woods institutions, to address these problems and the accumulated effects of regional instability. We have made a valiant effort, and we remain convinced that the donor community will, for its part, work with us in order to surmount our multiple challenges and create a better future for our citizens.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, His Excellency Mr. Abdus Samad Azad.

Mr. Azad (Bangladesh) (*spoke in Bengali; English text furnished by the delegation*): Mr. President, please accept our heartfelt congratulations on the assumption of your high office. Your unanimous election is a tribute to your great country, with which we enjoy friendly and fraternal relations. It is also a testimony to your diplomatic skills and personal standing in this world forum, where, on so many occasions, you have articulated most persuasively the concerns of the international community, particularly those of the marginalized and vulnerable. You are assured of the unstinting support of my delegation in the discharge of your very heavy responsibilities.

I should like to convey to your predecessor, the President of the General Assembly at its historic fiftieth session, His Excellency Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral, our appreciation for a job well done.

I should also like to pay a special tribute to our Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In a very

real sense, he is the first Secretary-General of the post-cold-war period, and has had to contend with issues and problems that were perhaps furthest from the minds and intentions of the founding fathers of our Organization. To his high office he has brought to bear clarity of vision and purpose, and a remarkable ability — as we have seen from two seminal reports, on the Agenda for Peace and the Agenda for Development — to present complex analyses and facts in a simple, distilled form. For nearly half a decade, he has handled what was once described by one of his predecessors as "the most impossible job on this earth" with verve, dignity and integrity.

Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Over two decades ago, the father of our nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, addressed the General Assembly at its twenty-ninth session, soon after Bangladesh's entry into the United Nations as a fully-fledged Member. In his speech he outlined some cardinal tenets, the basic focus and thrust of our foreign policy, and our domestic priorities. These hold good even today, in a world that has undergone radical transformation. As Bangabandhu stated, our foreign policy is based on the principles of peaceful coexistence and friendship towards all.

Our political party, the Awami League, has only recently been returned to office, through the process of general elections, after a gap of more than 20 years. As was stressed by our leader at the twenty-ninth session of the General Assembly, our total commitment to peace is born of the realization that only in an environment of peace can our people concentrate their energies and resources in combating the scourges of poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy and unemployment that still beset a large proportion of humankind. We naturally place special importance and emphasis on the development of good-neighbourly relations with the countries of our region, on the basis of universally accepted principles of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. We identify wholeheartedly with the aspirations and hopes of developing countries in general, particularly those belonging to the Non-Aligned Movement, and share a special affinity with the fraternal member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). We share with our development partners the goal of improving the quality of life of our people, and our relations with them are of the greatest significance to us.

The existence of friendly and good-neighbourly relations does not necessarily preclude the emergence of problems. What these can ensure, however, is that the best of political will, goodwill and good intentions are brought to bear in seeking solutions to any outstanding problems or any new ones that may arise. Such an approach would go a long way towards resolving any differences or disputes.

Our outstanding problem with India over the sharing of the waters of the Ganges River is not unknown to this forum. Water resources play a predominant role in the socio-economic development of a country. For Bangladesh, the availability of fresh river water in adequate volumes is indispensable for purposes of agriculture, irrigation, fisheries, river traffic, maintaining ecological and environmental balance and preventing the intrusion of salinity. The importance that we attach to this issue cannot be overemphasized and we have resumed bilateral discussions with India, in an atmosphere of mutual confidence and trust, to resolve this vexed problem amicably and equitably so that our legitimate concerns can be met.

On the subject of water resources, I should like to digress a little from the purely national and also bilateral context, because the shortage of fresh water resources is not, let me emphasize, unique or peculiar to Bangladesh or our region. Even from the international perspective, it is an issue of primal significance. According to a recent strategy paper of the Committee on Natural Resources of the Economic and Social Council, by the year 2025, 52 countries with a total population of more than 3 billion people will be water-stressed or face chronic water scarcity. The problem has as much to do with the availability of fresh water in the overall global context as with the fact that such resources, even when available in abundant quantities, may be found in the wrong places or are available at the wrong times. The problem, therefore, is intimately and intricately linked to efficient water management.

The question of water is not new to the global agenda and, since the Mar del Plata Conference in March of 1977, there have been international programmes on water-related issues. It has not, however, in our view, received the priority that it deserves. An international code of conduct for water-sharing was provided for in the Mar del Plata Action Plan and, as the strategy paper of the Committee on Natural Resources suggests, an international code of water ethics is needed more urgently today than ever before as a guide to help countries in their efforts to reach bilateral and multilateral agreements. The paper also suggests an

international convention on freshwater resources along the lines of those that already exist on biodiversity, ozone depletion and climate change. In particular, the paper stresses that the United Nations should develop principles and ethics on sharing the joint planetary freshwater resources. These are ideas that, in our view, warrant serious consideration by the world community.

Reverting to the subject of our Government's priorities, let me just add that, in the domestic sphere, like all other developing countries, we are striving for a human development paradigm that will prioritize people, especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged sectors. We will pursue a programme of reforms with emphasis on our domestic considerations: poverty alleviation and economic growth with social justice. The social sectors will receive special attention.

The 1990s has been a period of democratic renewal. Our Government firmly believes that it is as important, and perhaps more difficult, to live up to great principles and ideas as to fight for their realization. That is why we shall strive to strengthen our polity through institutions and laws.

Through constitutional amendment, an important innovation for democratic institutions and practice was effected in Bangladesh, following overwhelming popular demand, prior to our general elections in June. Three months before general elections are to be held, the Government will demit office and hand over power to a non-partisan and neutral caretaker Government to be headed by the most recently retired Chief Justice of the country and comprised of eminent apolitical personalities appointed on his advice, keeping in mind the sensitivities of the major political parties. The principal mandate of the caretaker Government will be to ensure free and fair general elections to be conducted by an independent constitutional authority, the Election Commission. Foreign observers were welcome to observe the electoral process, completely unhindered, in 1996 and 1991. Reports submitted by international observers can be of help in identifying any shortcomings or gaps that may exist and also contain constructive suggestions for improvement. These steps are the national equivalents of confidence-building measures between and among States.

Democracy, of course, goes well beyond the holding of periodic general elections. It is a continuous process and even a culture and ethos, which above all denote a certain approach and attitude to governance. We in Bangladesh see democracy as more than a laudable and

desirable objective. In the long term, democratic and accountable government affords the most efficacious and stable medium to develop the economy of a State and to achieve prosperity for its people. The very apposite point has been made, however, that democracy cannot on its own be a panacea for the diverse problems that confront many countries. There must also be effective international cooperation and a supportive external economic environment if the major socio-economic problems are to be meaningfully addressed.

The cold war is now truly behind us and the object now is to win the peace. Peace is not simply the absence of war, but should encompass every human condition, necessity and amenity that make for a civilized and dignified life. It is inseparable from security and is the flip side of development. Political, economic and social issues are today intimately and intricately intertwined. Political internationalism without economic internationalism can only be likened to a house built upon sand. Most emphatically in this day and age of interdependence, no nation can achieve its fullest development alone. This is an area where the United Nations and the United Nations system clearly have a constructive role to play.

The main purposes of the United Nations, as outlined in Chapter I of the Charter, include the achievement of international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character and also to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.

The Bretton Woods institutions are, of course, major players in the field of development policy and research. There is also, in our view, a patent need and ample justification in the Charter provisions for the United Nations and the United Nations system to play a meaningful role in global macroeconomic policy and strategy formulation. The United Nations is the universal forum for dialogue and decisions on such issues. This is an area in which, in particular, a revitalized Economic and Social Council can play a constructive and fruitful role. While the United Nations economic role provides special focus on operational, welfare and humanitarian activities, there is certainly a need for greater harmony and coordination between the United Nations systems on the one hand and the Bretton Woods institutions on the other.

On the subject of development, let me reaffirm that a supportive external environment is an indispensable supplement to national efforts and policies. Poverty is arguably the prime source of world disorder and needs to

be addressed, *inter alia*, through sustained and enhanced flows of resources from the North to the countries of the South. The gap between North and South is widening at an ominous rate. In 1890, the wealth of each European was twice that of a South Asian. Today, the gap is 70-fold. In 1960, the per capita gross national product of the richest 20 per cent of States was 30 times higher than that of the poorest 20 per cent. By 1989, the gap had widened to 60 times. By 1994, only four countries members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) had reached the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product as official development assistance. The average figure for DAC countries actually fell from 0.31 per cent in 1993 to 0.30 per cent in 1994. The least developed countries' share of world trade has plummeted in two decades from 0.8 per cent to a mere 0.4 per cent.

The problems of the 48 least developed countries continue to deserve special consideration on the global development agenda. The Mid-term Global Review of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s has pointed to the limited progress made in the implementation of commitments by our development partners. The development initiatives of the least-developed countries are stunted by problems associated with formidable structural adjustment programmes, the decline of an already low level of development resources, and the extremely low level of exports compounded by limited market access. The debt-relief measures taken thus far have remained grossly inadequate. We urge our development partners to adopt specific and concrete measures to redress these problems. We welcome the statements of several delegations that asked the removal of barriers on the products of the least developed countries. We believe that, at the forthcoming Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization in December, every participant will work to remove all obstacles to trade from this vulnerable group of countries.

The problems of developing countries are also, at one remove, the problems of the whole world, because prosperity, like peace and stability, is in the final analysis indivisible. For developed countries, assistance to the countries of the South will surely constitute an investment in a more secure, stable and, I have no doubt, eventually prosperous third world. The marginalization of developing countries would be morally indefensible, politically self-defeating and economically counter-productive. The aspirations of the South and the prosperity of the North are emphatically not mutually exclusive.

As the first United Nations Secretary-General put it, the United Nations was as strong an Organization as the representatives in San Francisco could agree upon. Half a century later, the United Nations remains the indispensable linchpin of any international order, a role for which it is uniquely conditioned, equipped and mandated. I should like to stress here that an effective and credible United Nations is even more vital and relevant for the smaller and more vulnerable States than for the more powerful ones.

In today's vastly altered world, the United Nations and its system offer even broader promise than what its founding fathers could have envisioned. However, like all organizations, the United Nations system is also subject to the Darwinian dictum of "adapt or perish". Much thought, effort and work are therefore being devoted to the goal of making the United Nations more attuned and responsive to changing times and requirements, charting its future course and defining its new emphases and priorities.

The United Nations areas of responsibility should clearly cover problems or issues between States, especially those that are pandemic in range and global in consequence. Environmental degradation, human rights, burgeoning populations, the situation and rights of women and children, the depletion of non-renewable natural resources, drugs, migration, international terrorism and corruption in international business could very well — in addition to issues of international peace, security and development — be the topical objects of United Nations policies and actions. We would, of course, want a United Nations that is streamlined and focused, open and accountable, with professional management systems and structures.

On the subject of Security Council reform, a number of proposals have been mooted, including a wide-ranging one by Italy. There is a broad convergence, if not consensus, on the idea that the overall size of an expanded Council should not exceed a figure in the low or mid-twenties. An agreement as to whether expansion should cover only the non-permanent category or both categories of seats, or could even include a new semi-permanent category, still continues to elude us. It is our view that three aspects of the issue should be given priority.

Firstly, the smaller and the more vulnerable States that by definition pose no threat to international security have the most vital stakes in the United Nations. Their interests and concerns may not be overlooked in any restructuring of the Council. Experience also shows that smaller countries with no vested interests have played a more constructive role as Council members in general.

Secondly, the objective of any reform and restructuring should be a more effective and dynamic Council. Nothing should be allowed to detract from this.

Thirdly, the moral dimension in determining criteria for possible new categories of membership or for any addition to permanent ranks should be given due consideration. This would include a country's commitment to the principles and purposes of the Charter, to democratic government and the essential freedoms, human rights and, in general, respect for United Nations decisions.

The Secretary-General is the most visible symbol and personification of the United Nations and the United Nations system. We see him as something more than the chief administrative officer of the Organization, as stipulated in the Charter, because he also has important political responsibilities. A former Secretary-General was of the view that the Secretary-General should be of help in

"filling any vacuum that may appear in the systems which the Charter and traditional diplomacy provide for the safeguarding of peace and security".

While efforts are being made to enhance the effectiveness of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the operational arms of the United Nations system, we could perhaps consider ways of strengthening the office of Secretary-General. One idea that we would commend for consideration is the establishment of a committee, along the lines of the General Committee of the General Assembly, that the Secretary-General could consult, formally or informally, collectively or by individual member, on important administrative and political issues. Such a committee would serve useful purposes, particularly in ensuring the rightful role of the General Assembly.

First, it would ensure closer interaction and exchange between the Secretary-General and the General Assembly. Secondly, it would provide the Secretary-General the benefit of dispassionate counsel and a feel for the thinking of Member States on issues in an institutional manner. And, thirdly, it would make for greater transparency in decision-making.

The objective of any reform and restructuring exercise is a strengthened United Nations that is institutionally better equipped to fulfil its mandate. Reforms, however, can only supplement, not be a

substitute for the political will to do what is right and warranted by the purposes and principles and other provisions of the Charter. Over the years, when the United Nations has floundered or failed, the predominant reasons were more often, unfortunately, the lack of political will rather than insuperable local difficulties or institutional lacunas.

I should like to touch very briefly upon the dismal financial situation of the United Nations, which has become very serious indeed. Member States have every right and even a duty to demand the best value for their money. The United Nations, however, must be provided the wherewithal to discharge its responsibilities. We welcome the United States commitment to meet its financial obligations to the United Nations and to pay its arrears over a five-year period.

Some interesting suggestions on United Nations reform have emanated from the Group of Seven Summit in Lyon earlier this year. These envisage some savings from the removal of overlap, improvement in the effectiveness of some agencies and commissions, and consolidation and rationalization of certain programmes. I have no doubt that the Fifth Committee and perhaps the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions will look closely at these proposals. We, of course, welcome the suggestion that any savings from such reforms are planned to be reinvested in development programmes.

A more realistic perspective of the expenditures incurred by the United Nations is afforded by comparing the United Nations budget with expenses incurred in certain activities by national or even local Governments. For example, in 1992, the United Nations regular assessed budget was about the size of the New York City Fire Department budget. In 1994, the cost of the entire United Nations system, including all emergency operations, was over \$10 billion, or about \$2 per capita of the planet's population. The expenditure on arms in the same year was about \$150 per capita.

While every scope and avenue for greater cost-effectiveness should be explored, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the United Nations gives good value for money. Expenditures on peacekeeping and the United Nations system are in a real sense an investment in peace and security.

Disarmament has always been accorded a very high priority in the United Nations. In particular, the question of nuclear disarmament has always received the highest

priority. With the end of the cold war, there is an increasing awareness of the need to address this issue in all earnestness. The indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) last year and the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty by an overwhelming majority in the General Assembly are welcome steps towards the ultimate goal of nuclear disarmament. The International Court of Justice, in its recent Advisory Opinion on the issue of nuclear weapons, stressed the obligation

"to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control". (A/51/4, para. 182 (f))

Like chemical and biological weapons, nuclear weapons must be outlawed. In the post-cold-war world, they have become an anachronism. They do not enhance international security and can only imperil world peace.

For Bangladesh, the pursuit of general and complete disarmament is a fundamental principle of State policy. As a new member of the Conference on Disarmament, we are fully prepared to play a constructive role towards this goal. Bangladesh, together with most members of the G-21, has submitted a proposal in the Conference on Disarmament on the elimination of nuclear weapons. This has been circulated as a Conference on Disarmament document. We accept that substantial reductions are being made under START I and START II in the nuclear arsenals of the two major nuclear Powers. The uncomfortable fact remains, however, that even after START II is completed by the year 2003 at the latest, there will still be more nuclear warheads in existence than in 1970, when the NPT came into force. The need to move speedily towards a third START treaty and beyond is very obvious.

Peacekeeping continues to be a most significant area of United Nations activity. The United Nations has indeed achieved some notable successes in peacekeeping missions in recent times, examples of which include those in El Salvador, Cambodia, Haiti, Mozambique and Angola. Bangladesh is proud to play an active role in United Nations peacekeeping activities. Our peacekeepers have shed their blood and sacrificed their lives in the cause of peace throughout the world.

There is room for cautious optimism on the issue of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We sincerely hope that the Dayton Agreement will be implemented in its entirety and

that a genuine peace will return to that beleaguered region. Bangladesh will continue to support all efforts towards this objective through regional as well as multilateral forums.

Recent developments in the Middle East have been of concern to us all. Bangladesh expressed its grave concern and outrage at the recent violence and killings that took place in the West Bank and Gaza and the disrespect shown to the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque. We call upon all concerned to honour their commitments under the peace accord with a view to finding a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, which Bangladesh believes will enable the emergence of a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital. The Government and the people of Bangladesh stand by President Yasser Arafat and our Palestinian brethren. We also reaffirm our commitment and support to the Arab and Palestinian cause.

In a very real sense, the United Nations belongs to the entire human family. Over the years, it has been a potent moral force and an influence for the good. It remains the only credible vehicle that can move the world towards the goal of international peace and prosperity. The institution of the United Nations itself, comprised of Member States large and small, attests to mankind's wisdom and desire for peace. We have every confidence and hope that, in the crucial years ahead, a revitalized United Nations will continue to play an effective role in deciding the transcendent policy issues of the day.

Differences between peoples, countries and nations can and do exist, and yet all share a common vision, hopes and aspirations. Good men and women all over the globe must surely dream the same dreams of lasting peace and happiness.

Over 50 years ago, a great world leader — one of the architects of the Atlantic Charter and one of the first persons to use the term "United Nations" — made an impassioned plea for peace when he wrote:

"We are faced with the pre-eminent fact that if civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationship — the ability of peoples of all kinds to live together and work together in the same world at peace."

President Roosevelt did not live to speak those words, which he wrote for what would have been his last address. His words are surely relevant even today.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now call on the Chairman of the delegation of Azerbaijan, His Excellency Mr. Eldar Kouliev.

Mr. Kouliev (Azerbaijan) (*interpretation from Russian*): I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

At the outset, allow me to congratulate Mr. Razali Ismail on his election to the high post of President of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session, which attests to the recognition of Malaysia's authority in the international arena. I am confident that, under his able guidance, the General Assembly will write another exemplary chapter in the annals of United Nations history.

I also take this opportunity to extend our deep gratitude to the President of the last, historic fiftieth session of the General Assembly, Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral, for the excellent manner in which he led the work of the Assembly.

The Azerbaijani Republic attaches special importance to the creation of a new world order, based primarily on the strict observance by all States of the fundamental principles of international law and on the comprehensive system of international security. World security must take into consideration the interests of all sovereign States, irrespective of their size or population. No single State should ensure its own security at the expense of another.

In a transformed world in the late twentieth century, the euphoria of post-bloc relations has begun to yield to the sober realization that mankind is faced today with acute problems of an increasingly global nature. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, aggressive separatism, international terrorism, drug trafficking and environmental pollution are common problems that must be resolved through joint efforts. In these conditions, the consolidated action of Member States will permit a quicker identification of the real mechanisms needed to address these serious problems.

Azerbaijan welcomes the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, recently opened for signature. The objective achieved had been sought for many decades. It is a major contribution to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, in particular, and disarmament in general.

Taking into account the historical experience of the world community and striving to attain the highest human values, the Government of Azerbaijan, in the person of President Heydar Aliyev, having unified the nation, is heading with determination along the path of democratic reform, since only a climate of peace and national accord based on respect for civic rights and human liberties can ensure the overall development of the individual and society and create conditions conducive to normal interaction with the world at large and the country's achievement of democratic political, economic and humanitarian standards.

However, every aspect of life in my country has been seriously affected by the aggression of the Republic of Armenia. The occupation of about 20 per cent of the territory of Azerbaijan and the seizure and plunder of towns and villages, including tens of thousands of objects taken from households, industry, agriculture, the infrastructure and the social sector, continue to inflict enormous damage on the Azerbaijani State. "Ethnic cleansing" has been carried out in the occupied territories. The country faces an extremely serious humanitarian situation. The number of refugees and displaced persons has passed the one million mark, a figure that is catastrophic for a country with a total population of 7.5 million.

Still, we continue to consider peaceful negotiations within the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk process to be the only way to settle the conflict. It was for that reason that Azerbaijan, despite the continuing occupation of its lands and the presence of enormous numbers of refugees and displaced persons, consented to the ceasefire which has lasted for more than two years.

The Republic of Armenia, endeavouring to consolidate the gains from its past aggression, refuses to recognize Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity and thereby entirely discredits one of the fundamental principles of international law as a basis for settlement. That refusal has become a major obstacle to the achievement of peace.

I would like to reconfirm our clear compromise position on the settlement, which envisages the assurance of unconditional and immediate implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions and OSCE decisions regarding the conflict. The package of our proposals to speed up progress in the Minsk process towards the achievement of a comprehensive settlement consists of these elements: the withdrawal of Armenian forces from all occupied territories of Azerbaijan, including the Shusha and Lachin districts; the return of the Azerbaijani population to

their previous places of residence, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan; ensuring equal security, monitored by the OSCE forces, for the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations who have suffered as a result of the armed conflict; and guarantees that autonomy will be granted to the entire population of the region constituting Azerbaijan.

At their meeting on 22 April 1996 in Luxembourg, held within the framework of the conclusion of bilateral agreements on partnership and cooperation between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia and the European Union, the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia adopted a joint communiqué expressing their agreement that the resolution of the conflict will make a substantial contribution to regional stability and security as well as to the socio-economic development of the peoples of the region.

In reflecting on the establishment of a security system at the regional and pan-European levels, we would like to emphasize that in our view the forthcoming OSCE Summit in Lisbon constitutes a real opportunity for the elaboration of basic principles for the settlement, not only for the settlement, not only of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, but possibly also other conflicts in the OSCE area. The relevant provisions of the Summit's final document, agreed at the highest level, could play a most important role in the positive development of negotiations both within the OSCE Minsk process and in all other current mediatory efforts of the OSCE.

For several years since the end of the cold war active discussions have been taking place in the world on the transformation of international relations. These discussions are held at different levels and touch upon almost all aspects of life of the world community. The United Nations, as the leading international organization, is the main forum for gathering and testing a majority of ideas related to a vision and understanding of processes taking place in the world in recent years, and the possibilities for their implementation in the name of human progress.

In recent years these have been wide discussions on an increase in the membership of the Security Council or, in a broader context, on its reform in the light of the substantial increase in the membership of the United Nations and the major changes in international relations. In this regard, it is important to take into account the need to maintain and even strengthen the ability of the

Security Council to respond adequately to threats of international peace and security.

Azerbaijan supports the candidatures of Germany and Japan as potential permanent members of the Security Council. At the same time, the question of equitable representation of all regions among the permanent members should not disappear from the agenda. In this context, it should be noted that many other ideas and proposals have been put forward, in particular by Italy and a number of other States, which must be thoroughly studied.

Azerbaijan fully supports the efforts undertaken by the international community in response to the alarming increase in terrorist acts in recent years. We unequivocally condemn, as criminal and unjustifiable, all acts, methods and practices of terrorism, wherever and by whomever they are committed, including those that jeopardize friendly relations among States and peoples and threaten the territorial integrity and security of States. Azerbaijan supports the establishment of a specialized international organization to combat terrorism.

Azerbaijan attaches crucial importance to the process of integration into the global economic system, and considers it one of the main requisites for the formation of a multidimensional, dynamic market economy and an open democratic society. For this purpose legislation has been adopted to strengthen market economy principles, notably through laws on private property, free enterprise, banking activities, foreign investment protection, and so on. Economic reform in Azerbaijan and the implementation of economic projects are being carried out in active collaboration with the Bretton Woods institutions. Concrete measures have been worked out and are being implemented to shape State economic policy for the transitional period. They include the reform of the monetary and credit system and the development of pricing and tax policies. A three-year programme to privatize State enterprises has been launched. To achieve this goal Azerbaijan actively encourages foreign investment, and has embarked on a consistent course of liberalization of foreign economic activity, the gradual elimination of non-tariff restrictions, and encouragement of national exports.

The Azerbaijan Republic agrees on the need for the structural reform and financial normalization of the United Nations. In this regard, I would like once again to draw the General Assembly's attention to the problem of the assessment of fair contributions to the United Nations budget that will reflect the real capacity of States to pay. While we welcome the decision of principle to abolish the

system of limits, we nevertheless consider that the long-windedness of this process is resulting in the deterioration of the financial situation of the newly independent States, including Azerbaijan, which is obliged, in order to clear its debts to the United Nations budget, to cut down on the already very meagre programmes of social support for the population, particularly refugees and displaced persons.

The Government of Azerbaijan would also like to draw particular attention to the need for fair representation of the new independent States within the staff of the United Nations. While we are aware of the difficulties the Organization is now experiencing, we cannot accept a situation in which Azerbaijan is still not represented in the secretariats of the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

The economic reforms carried out in Azerbaijan are aimed largely at improving the social situation of the population. However, the monthly income of a considerable portion of the population is below the subsistence level, given the persisting economic difficulties in a country with an economy in transition, which have been aggravated by the burden of providing the necessary assistance to the refugees and displaced persons.

In such a situation, great importance attaches to special humanitarian and other forms of assistance from the United Nations, its specialized agencies and donor countries, including assistance for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of a number of regions of Azerbaijan that have suffered as a result of military action. While expressing the deep gratitude of the people of Azerbaijan for the assistance provided, we appeal to donor countries not to reduce its scale.

I am confident that the United Nations will continue to do its best to act as a catalyst in the achievement of peaceful coexistence among States, and to reinforce the notion of the interdependence of national aspirations and the common welfare of humanity, thus creating conditions conducive to the political stability and sustainable economic development of States.

The potential exists to reinforce and strengthen the work of the United Nations. We are increasingly witnessing the expansion of the Organization's sphere of activity, when it goes beyond the bounds of the traditional concept of maintenance of international peace and security and tackles more diversified tasks. Activities such as electoral assistance, the provision of special

humanitarian assistance, human rights monitoring, assistance in nation-building and the creation of conditions for the sustainable development of States have begun to be associated around the world with the United Nations today.

In concluding, I should like to recall the well-known maxim: "The best world is a world that belongs to all, and it becomes possible only through the efforts of all." So let us unite our efforts for the sake of building such a world.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now call on the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Royal Government of Cambodia, His Excellency Mr. Ung Huot.

Mr. Ung Huot (Cambodia) (*interpretation from French*): Allow me, at the outset, to warmly congratulate His Excellency Mr. Razali Ismail, on behalf of the Cambodian delegation, on his election to the post of President of this Assembly. His election is a tribute to his professionalism, as well as to his country, Malaysia, with which Cambodia has traditionally entertained close and cordial relations. My delegation is convinced that with his competence and experience, Ambassador Ismail will guide our session with wisdom and perspicacity to a successful conclusion.

My delegation would also like to congratulate and thank His Excellency Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral of Portugal for his successful presidency of the General Assembly's fiftieth session.

I wish also to take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to an individual to whom the Royal Kingdom of Cambodia owes profound gratitude for the role he has played in the peace process in our country — the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali — for his performance and sincere dedication in accomplishing this lofty mission.

(*spoke in English*)

The forthcoming 23 October will be the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict. The Royal Government and people of Cambodia will mark this historic event with a nationwide celebration. The Agreement was forged

"to maintain, preserve and defend the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and inviolability, neutrality and national unity of Cambodia" (*Agreement*

on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict, DPI/1180-92077, p. 8, para. 3)

through the restoration of peace and the promotion of national reconciliation in the country. The Cambodian people will always remember the sacrifices made by the international community on their behalf, especially those eminent persons who dedicated themselves to the cause of peace and democracy in our country. We are indeed indebted to them all and remain deeply grateful for their continued contribution to the reconstruction and development of Cambodia, allowing it once more to take its proper place in the concert of nations.

The Royal Government of Cambodia, presided over by His Royal Highness Samdech Krom Preah Norodom Ranariddh and His Excellency Samdech Hun Sen, was born of a free and fair election organized and supervised by the United Nations in May 1993. It is now barely three years old, but thanks to the determination of the Cambodian people and the invaluable assistance and support given by this world body and its agencies, other international organizations and friendly countries, the rebuilding of Cambodia has proceeded apace.

In "An Agenda for Peace", His Excellency the Secretary-General Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali spoke of the need for the United Nations to give careful consideration to the requirements of post-conflict peace-building. As can be seen from the Cambodian experience, this is a complex and multifaceted process. The Secretary-General's Representative in Cambodia The Honourable Benny Widyono commented in a recent article that

"post-conflict peace-building is not just a collection of disjointed activities. It requires a holistic concept encompassing political, institutional, legal, economic and social objectives."

This holistic approach has also been very rapidly recognized by the Royal Government. Nine months after the general elections, it launched the National Programme for the Rehabilitation and the Development of Cambodia, in February 1994. At the same time, it was able to ensure political stability, improve security and engineer a rapid economic recovery, as reflected by a strong gross domestic product growth of 7.6 per cent, an inflation rate kept at 3.5 per cent and a stable exchange rate of the national currency throughout 1995. These figures, combined with a liberal investment law and a low gross domestic product of \$287 per capita, are providing strong incentives for foreign direct investment, in particular now

that Cambodia enjoys most-favoured-nation status with the United States, the European Union and other important countries in the world. Soon Cambodia hopes to obtain Generalized System of Preferences status.

In pursuing its aims of structural reforms and development while seeking to improve the quality of life of its citizens, the Royal Government is conscious of the need for environmental protection. Cambodia has become a signatory of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification. The Government is ever mindful of its responsibility to protect Cambodia's rich natural heritage, in the interests both of its people and of the world at large. Therefore, as stated by the First Prime Minister at the First Consultative Group Meeting, held last July in Tokyo, the Royal Government is committed to implementing a sustainable and transparent forest policy in line with the recommendations put forward in a joint study made by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Being profoundly conscious that development requires security, problems linked with the Khmer Rouge have to be addressed through their reintegration into the national fold, and through the long-term policy of development of rural areas. Military operations near the northwestern border are designed to gradually reduce the nuisance they pose and to convince them to join the national community. National unity remains the target of the Cambodian Government. The recent massive breakaway of the core groups of the Khmer Rouge testifies to the correctness of the Royal Government's approach.

Recognizing that Cambodia's tragic recent history requires special measures to assure the protection of human rights and the non-return to the policies and practices of the past, the Royal Government has pursued an active policy to ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all in Cambodia without discrimination as to race, sex or religion. In these efforts, it has received the technical assistance of the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, for which the Royal Government is greatly appreciative. In particular, Cambodia acknowledges the valued contribution of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Human Rights, Ambassador Thomas Hammarberg.

Mindful that human rights encompass political rights, the Kingdom of Cambodia adopted a policy of liberal democracy and pluralism, as stated in article 51 of the

Constitution of the Kingdom, in 1993. This includes the free exercise of political choice. In respect of its solemn commitment to the Constitution, the Royal Government is making preparations for the holding of local elections in 1997 and national elections in 1998. To this end, it welcomes international technical and financial assistance, as well as international observers.

The achievements of the Royal Government in a short period of time have given it the confidence to pursue efforts towards the declared aims of building a State governed by the rule of law, a market system that secures social benefits and ensuring the long term and sustainable development of the national economy within the framework of regional integration. Hence, last April, Cambodia submitted its official request for full membership in the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) by July 1997, in the recognition that ASEAN is the vehicle for peace, security, stability, shared opportunities and common prosperity in the region of South-East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region at large.

Cambodia also takes note that the ASEAN Regional Forum is an invaluable setting to discuss in a frank and friendly manner security issues of common concern and interest to all participants in the Forum, whether large or small countries around the world. The ASEAN Regional Forum has in fact already provided a sense of mutual confidence, as reflected in the comfort felt by all the senior officials and high representatives of the participating countries. It can be viewed as a first step in preventive, quiet diplomacy, thereby paving the way for agreements on substantive issues in the coming years based on the traditional consensus principle, which characterizes ASEAN.

Cambodia is particularly proud to be able to associate itself with all the countries in the region and to substantially contribute to regional and world peace through the signing of the South-East Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty on 15 December 1995. This marks real progress towards the creation of a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality in South-East Asia. Through the review of the Protocol to the Treaty, it is our earnest hope that all nuclear-weapon States will accede to the Treaty, in line with the aspirations of the peoples of South-East Asia for a nuclear-weapon-free zone in this part of the world.

Cambodia's position on the question of nuclear weapons has been and remains that a complete prohibition of nuclear weapons and their destruction are basic to

world peace. Thus, a complete test ban will lead towards the ultimate objective of complete nuclear disarmament. The Kingdom of Cambodia is proud to have been able to co-sponsor and sign the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, considered a significant step towards promoting nuclear disarmament. This will be the greatest service that our generation can perform to free future generations from the terrible prospect of a world holocaust.

While we are addressing the issue of the CTBT and the ban on weapons of mass destruction, we should not overlook the issue of landmines in various parts of the world. Cambodia is the hardest hit nation in the world. The Royal Government and the people of Cambodia pay great tribute to all the generous donor countries that have assisted us in our efforts to rid the country of the scourge of landmines. But how many millions of these cold, cruel and silent enemies still await our unsuspecting and innocent civilian population in remote areas of the country near the western border? Banning them is an easy job. We need international support to fully eradicate them.

In his message to the Review Conference of the States Parties to the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons last April, His Majesty Preah Bat Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk Varman, King of Cambodia, appealed to all countries and peoples, international organizations, States and Governments to take, in a universal consensus, concrete measures towards definitively outlawing, as soon as possible, the production, export, utilization and sale of mines.

The Kingdom of Cambodia is therefore gratified by the recent Chairman's statement for the Third ASEAN Regional Forum held last July in Jakarta. On the issue of the global elimination of anti-personnel mines, the Forum welcomed the decisions of several States to impose moratoria and bans on the production, export and operational use of these weapons. It recognized the need, following conflict, for reinforcing international support for efforts to detect and remove landmines and to assist victims. Cambodia welcomes the initiatives of the Federal Republic of Germany and of Canada in this General Assembly and gives its full support to the proposed resolutions.

Permit me to inform you, Sir, and all distinguished delegates that my country is presently facing severe floods affecting 1.3 million people, or one tenth of our population. On behalf of the Royal Government of Cambodia and on my own behalf, I would like to sincerely and deeply thank the friendly Governments that have immediately given

generous humanitarian assistance to our afflicted people. I would also like to take this opportunity to appeal to our other friends to help relieve this blight.

The Kingdom of Cambodia recognizes the need to focus attention on such issues as the trafficking in narcotics and other criminal behaviour, which transcend national borders and which can so intimately affect the lives of each one of our citizens and undermine our social structures. Such transnational issues do not appear amenable to resolution other than by immediate ongoing management through shared information and coordination. Of particularly urgent concern is the issue of drug trafficking.

The Kingdom of Cambodia is a victim of a rapid escalation in the traffic of drugs transiting through its territory. Unfortunately, Cambodia at present lacks the appropriate legal, technical and financial means to deal effectively with this problem. It nevertheless affirms its strong commitment to drug control through effective international cooperation. The Royal Government wishes sincerely to thank the United States of America for its strong support under the United States-Cambodia Agreement to Counter Narcotics.

Cambodia is pleased with the decision taken by the Third ASEAN Regional Forum to consider at the next meeting the question of drug trafficking and other related transnational issues such as economic crimes, including money laundering, which could constitute threats to the security of the countries of the region.

Through the good offices of the United Nations, multilateral approaches to problems have provided useful sources of information and highlighted issues close to the hearts of many of our citizens. The past summit conferences in Cairo, Copenhagen, Beijing and Istanbul have contributed to the promotion of gender equality, and have given recognition to the role of women and children, the improvement of the quality of life through health care and adequate housing, respect for human rights, and protection of the environment.

A further vital, and perhaps fundamental, issue for the attention of every member of the international community must be that of the widening gap between rich and poor nations. This gap and its effects on the quality of life of the citizens of the developing world is directly related to the nature, organization and health of the world economy. Vital decisions determining the shape and nature of the world economy are, however, well outside

the control of a vast majority of nations, particularly those in the third world.

Since the Non-Aligned Summit in Jakarta in 1992, no indications have been observed of a rapid and solid recovery in the world economy. Instabilities spread more quickly from one country to another, particularly to developing countries, which are now more vulnerable and sensitive to external factors. The continuing trend towards a global economy, with the increasingly free flow of capital throughout the world without reference to national borders, means that the ebbs and flows of the world economy have an almost immediate effect around the world. For many poorer nations, this has resulted in an increased national debt burden with the consequence of greater instability in the daily lives of their citizens.

Notions of competition are not realistic for countries that from the outset have a mammoth burden of debt, limited access to technology, and populations ill-equipped to meet the challenges of the global economy. It is Cambodia's strong hope that through the United Nations we can go a long way towards ameliorating this situation, which is already at a crisis point for many nations in the world community.

Therefore, the democratization of international economic relations is essential to ensure that the development interests of developing countries will be taken fully into account. In this regard, it is also essential to place development cooperation at the centre of the United Nations mandate, role and functions. To do this, the United Nations itself needs to begin the process of reform so that it is better able to deal with the conditions of the new global economy. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization should play a key role as focal points of the United Nations system in the areas of trade and development of developing countries. UNCTAD, in particular, needs to study trends and issues in the world economy, especially those that have an impact on developing countries, and propose policies and measures that can address projected problems. For instance, Generalized Special Preference (GSP) donors should simplify and harmonize the rules of origin. By the same token, all political conditions attached to international trade, development assistance and investment should cease. They represent, in fact, a new wave of protectionism.

(spoke in French)

The delegation of Cambodia is deeply concerned at the financial crisis in the United Nations today. With its modest resources, Cambodia intends to meet its responsibilities to do what it can to ease the financial crisis. But if this Organization is to continue to exist true to the spirit of its Charter, an equitable and fair solution must be found, taking into account the need for sweeping reform in United Nations structures which must reflect the rapid changes in various parts of the world that have taken place since the end of the cold war.

The broad reforms and restructuring of the United Nations must also extend to the Security Council to ensure that its work is both democratic and more effective. In particular, Cambodia supports closer relations between the Security Council and the General Assembly through greater accountability of the Council to the Assembly. Priority must be given to reform in economic, social and other areas so as better to meet the challenges and take account of the economic priorities of developing countries against the backdrop of globalization.

As one of the founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1956 in Brioni, Yugoslavia, Cambodia has consistently worked to promote solidarity among Members and cooperate in the search for lasting peace in the world and economic development that goes hand in hand with social justice for all humankind.

As His Majesty the King emphasized in his message on the thirty-fifth anniversary of its creation, the Non-Aligned Movement is currently meeting challenges unlike those that existed when it was established. Many lofty aspirations for national independence and freedom have become fact, but as His Majesty said:

"The majority of our members still have to deal with huge problems caused by unemployment, poverty, famine, drought, landmines, illiteracy, deforestation, racial discrimination and terrorism. We must therefore try to reduce military expenditure and the production of landmines in order to devote our national resources to the economic and social development of our peoples."

In recent years, the world has seen several developments regarding the strengthening of regional security and political stability. First of all, the Kingdom of Cambodia wishes sincerely to welcome the establishment of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development and the peace process in Mindanao. It fully supports the peace agreements

concluded between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front on 2 September 1996. These agreements will undoubtedly contribute to an end to the conflict in the southern Philippines, bringing both lasting peace to Mindanao and prosperity and national harmony to the fraternal people of the Philippines.

Cambodia welcomes the Dayton Peace Agreement and the signing on 14 December 1995 in Paris of the General Framework for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Framework Agreement) between the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and other concerned parties.

Cambodia welcomes the announcement of the end of the war in Chechnya, thereby ending the suffering of the warring parties, and particularly the innocent civilian population.

Cambodia welcomes progress made since August 1995 in the Middle East peace process, particularly the implementation of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel, the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip of 28 September 1995, the first Palestinian elections on 20 January 1996, as well as the beginning of negotiations on the final status between the Palestinians and Israelis in Taba in May 1996. Cambodia calls for the continuation of the peace talks, bearing in mind the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to an independent State on its national territory with the support of the international community.

My country is deeply concerned at the recent situation in Afghanistan where war continues to bring death and devastation. We hope that our Afghan brothers will be able to overcome their differences and will soon find the path to dialogue.

With regard to the situation on the Korean peninsula, Cambodia supports the reunification efforts of the Korean peoples on the basis of the principles set forth in the Joint Declaration on Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula of 4 July 1972 and the accord of February 1992. We also welcome initiatives to formulate a definitive peace agreement promoting solid peace and security on the peninsula.

In respect of Africa, the Royal Government of Cambodia welcomes the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 49/142. We are aware of the tremendous

difficulties facing African States in bringing development and prosperity to their respective peoples. Cambodia calls for the speedy implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s and the consolidation of efforts to diversify the African economy. We hope that with the helping hand of the international community, particularly the donor countries, this great continent will profit from the opportunities available to it and join in the efforts to achieve sustainable development, a major challenge facing all the countries of the world.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and External Trade of the Comoros, His Excellency Mr. Omar Said Ahmed.

Mr. Ahmed (Comoros) (*interpretation from French*): Allow me at the outset to address to the President the sincere congratulations of the delegation of the Comoros on his brilliant election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session. My country, the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros, is delighted by his election because, in our eyes, it is a unanimous tribute from the international community to his great, friendly country, Malaysia, with which the Comoros maintains excellent relations of cooperation and friendship. This choice is also a tribute to his personal qualifications as a veteran diplomat respected by all.

I also take this opportunity to convey our profound thanks to his predecessor, Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral of Portugal, for the devotion and skill with which he conducted the work of the fiftieth session of the General Assembly.

To Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the Secretary-General, that intrepid artisan of the lofty ideals of peace, solidarity and justice, I should like to pay a well-deserved tribute for the efforts that he continuously makes for the benefit of our world Organization.

My country adheres entirely to the Yaoundé Declaration adopted by the Heads of State and Government at the thirty-second session of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which recommends the candidature of Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali for a second term.

Last year, the United Nations commemorated with fanfare its fiftieth anniversary. More than 129 Heads of State and Government solemnly reaffirmed the ideals of

the maintenance of peace, the peaceful settlement of disputes and the strengthening of international cooperation and development. In the Declaration adopted at that commemorative meeting, the indispensable role of the United Nations was recognized by all. That is why the sovereign leaders of the world also called for the United Nations to be reformed and attuned to the requirements of modern times.

An objective analysis has made it possible to see that the structure of the Organization no longer corresponds to the realities of today's world, which is changing at the economic, political and geographic levels. At a time of globalization, when science and technology are revolutionizing communications, the interdependence of nations is emerging as an incontrovertible fact, and democracy is the only path of salvation for the peoples of the world, our Organization simply cannot and should not keep a body reserved exclusively to certain States on a permanent basis while the great majority has only temporary access to it.

In other words, Security Council reform is urgent and imperative if we are to act in accordance with the principle of the sovereign equality of States. In that connection, the Italian proposal for the reform of the Security Council offers specific advantages in terms of the possibility of access to the Council for small and medium-sized States.

No one denies the considerable role of the United Nations in the establishment of a global society that is more just and peaceful and better integrated. But everyone remembers the historic conditions of its creation. The end of the cold war, the elaboration of a number of conventions and treaties on disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are, in our view, moral values that guarantee the emergence of a world of peace in which the right to life and well-being will win out over barbarism and brute force.

At the dawn of the third millennium, the United Nations represents the only recourse for the emancipation of peoples and the eradication of poverty. In this connection, we must emphasize the considerable work done by the Organization's specialized agencies to help States requiring assistance in their daily struggle against underdevelopment.

There is no need to recall that, in the past five years, our Organization has initiated and organized a number of thematic conferences aimed at identifying solutions capable of inspiring States in their national policy-making. These

include the New York World Summit for Children, the Rio Conference on Environment and Development, the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development, the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development, the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women and, more recently, the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) at Istanbul. We are also entitled to hope that next November's Rome World Food Summit will offer effective guidance in this vital area.

The founding fathers of our Organization, recalling the horrors and atrocities of the Second World War, bequeathed to us an instrument that grants primacy to law and dialogue. Unfortunately, other modern scourges, such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, occupation and civil war have continued to raise the clamour of weapons within States.

The victims of these new wars are the same as those of yesterday's — women, children and the elderly.

The resurgence of violence in the Middle East in the past few days, arising from the many provocations orchestrated by the new Israeli authorities, throws into the question the peace process, which recognizes the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to a sovereign and independent State.

For my country, the resumption of the peace process necessarily involves a withdrawal of Israeli troops from occupied territories of the Golan and southern Lebanon. The closing of the tunnel under the Al-Aqsa Mosque is a *sine qua non* for reducing tensions and halting the violence. During the past 30 years of warfare in the Middle East, the victims have been and remain the civilian populations. No one can forget the Gulf war or its consequences for all parties concerned.

My country urges Iraq to seek a solution that would ensure the peace and security of its neighbours and include respect for the independence and territorial integrity of Kuwait. In this connection, the question of Kuwaiti prisoners detained by Iraq is a concern, the settlement of which would send a signal of willingness for appeasement.

The illegal occupation of the islands of Tunb and Abu Musa by Iran is also a source of tension in that part of the world. The United Arab Emirates is sparing no effort to recover peacefully that integral part of its territory.

The embargoes imposed on the Libyan and Iraqi peoples are of concern to my country. Our Organization must seek ways and means to enable the parties concerned to begin a dialogue aimed at a solution that would alleviate the suffering of the civilian populations of these countries.

The advent of a democratic and multiracial South Africa and the peace restored to Angola and Mozambique should not make us overlook the fact that the African continent is still a theatre of conflict. Like the international community, my country remains concerned over the deterioration of the situation and the persistence of violence in Burundi. Only a return to constitutional order and to republican legality can reduce tensions and foster a dialogue between all the people of Burundi. We encourage President *Mwalimu* Julius Nyerere in his mediation efforts aimed at a peaceful solution.

The recent Abuja Agreement on Liberia offers a glimmer of hope for peace, provided that all the factions observe the current ceasefire and participate in the disarmament and demobilization of troops.

The Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front have made a commitment to negotiation in order to put an end to the tragic fratricidal war in that country. We can only encourage such initiatives and commend Côte d'Ivoire for its mediation.

The situation in Somalia warrants special attention. It demonstrates the inability of the international community to find a viable solution to the Somali tragedy.

The question of Western Sahara also requires in-depth consideration on the part of our Organization, because this question involves safeguarding the unity and territorial integrity of a State Member of our Organization, the Kingdom of Morocco.

Fortunately, other conflicts are coming to an end. Thus, the recent elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina mark a decisive new stage in the consolidation of peace and security — the only condition that would make national reconstruction possible in that country long devastated by war.

The world has become a global village fraught with inequality for its inhabitants. Indeed, the new world economic order and development strategies have not bridged the gap separating the rich and poor countries. The mid-term review of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s has made it possible to

note that the Agenda has not had the desired impact on development, despite its harmonized priorities and objectives. But we dare to hope that the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for Africa, which complements the New Agenda, will stimulate the process and accelerate the integration of Africa into the international trading system. For now, small States can only expect a continued drop in the prices of their raw materials and an increasingly unbearable debt burden.

The Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros, a small island State that is among the least developed, is one of those excluded from international trade because, in addition to its limited natural resources and the high cost of international transport, other political and structural constraints have been brought to bear that bridle its socio-economic development.

The recent history of my country has been characterized by a series of tragedies. The Assembly will certainly recall the dramatic events of September 1995 in the wake of the invasion of the country by mercenaries. This aroused the indignation of the international community and brought true economic and social disaster to my country. The people of the Comoros have suffered too deeply from repeated attempts at destabilization fomented from abroad. We appeal to the international community to ensure that such practices — which belong to another era — come to an end throughout the world.

I take this opportunity to reiterate our profound gratitude to France, whose military intervention, requested by the Government of the Comoros in accordance with the defence agreements between our two countries, made it possible to rout the mercenaries. In the same context, I am pleased to pay a vibrant tribute to the Organization of African Unity for the decisive role it played in restoring constitutional order.

We also extend our gratitude to the United Nations and all those who, near or far, contributed to the organization of the first free, democratic and transparent elections, which brought President Mohamed Taki Abdoukarim to the highest office of my country.

This short overview of conditions in the Comoros demonstrates the extent to which the newly elected Head of State has inherited a catastrophic situation, characterized by an exorbitant external debt, an empty State treasury and months of unpaid salaries for government officials.

Yet, strengthened by his popular legitimacy and the support of a broad majority of the people of the Comoros, in six months President Taki drafted the broad outlines of political, economic and social reforms to overcome the numerous obstacles impeding the construction of a democratic, prosperous and interdependent society in the Comoros. A vast programme was set up in the economic and financial sphere that included financial stabilization measures, a State audit, monitoring of civil servants and a recovery of State movable property and real estate. The results are promising and, for the first time, there are cases of corruption and embezzlement of government funds before the Comorian justice system.

In this series of reforms, the private sector has pride of place. That is why the Government is disengaging itself from the monopoly it has enjoyed in many sectors which it has turned over to dynamic privatization that generates growth.

Official contacts have been opened with financial institutions and development partners of the Comoros in order to establish a structural adjustment programme with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to restore my country's credibility.

In the social sphere, ministerial departments — *inter alia*, those of national education and public health — have mobilized their energies to rehabilitate these very sensitive and vital sectors. An international conference on education in the Comoros is planned for next December and we invite all friendly countries, international and regional bodies to participate in that important meeting, aimed at mobilizing the necessary resources to finance education that meets the expectations of Comorian youth.

In the political and institutional sectors, the incredible proliferation of small political parties and a jury-rigged Constitution that is ineffective and difficult to implement have seriously hampered the new democratic process. Thus, the new presidential majority, comprised of more than 18 political parties out of the 25 that have been officially recognized, has merged into one great national political movement. A consultative commission comprised of all the active forces within the nation — political parties, trade unions and human rights and environmental associations — has been working to amend the Constitution. Their draft will be submitted for approval this month to the Comorian people in a referendum. As soon as it is adopted, legislative and regional elections will be held to set up a parliament for the country and municipal institutions for the regions.

After 21 years of independence, the Comoros are still being built. President Mohamed Taki Abdoukarim is aware of what is at stake. He knows that we must first rely on our own efforts, but he also knows that he may rely on the effective support of the international community, especially the United Nations and its specialized agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, to which we reiterate our complete confidence and deep gratitude for their efforts towards the development of the Comoros.

From this rostrum, I solemnly appeal to the international community to give special economic assistance to the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros.

I cannot conclude my statement without mentioning the question of the Comorian island of Mayotte, which is on the fifty-first session's agenda as a separate item. At the appropriate time, I will not fail to detail developments and to express our hope of a settlement in the wake of the democratic changes that have occurred in the Comoros in the past six months.

The end of the twentieth century challenges our collective conscience to build a better world for future generations — a world without war and without poverty, a world in which injustice, violence, drugs, terrorism and fundamentalism will no longer exist. Of course, one might say that such a world is impossible because profit-seeking, protectionism and intolerance are obstacles to progress and hindrances to the well-being of humanity. But progress in science, technology and medicine reinforces our optimism.

It is in this spirit that our faith is revived in a United Nations that is more dynamic and more democratic, a United Nations in which the rule of numbers will carry as much weight as the rule of strength.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now call on the Chairman of the delegation of Palau, His Excellency Mr. David Orrukem.

Mr. Orrukem (Palau): It is my distinct honour to address the United Nations during this historic session, which I am confident will be remembered for all time for its adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

The Republic of Palau applauds and thanks those countries that will be signatories to the Treaty, for we believe that it does much to advance our goal of ridding the planet of nuclear weapons. The Treaty, by banning further testing, will help prevent the development of more dangerous nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the Treaty will help prevent other nations from obtaining existing nuclear weapons. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty thus clearly helps to make the world a safer place for us and for all of our children.

The Republic of Palau's commitment against the creation and proliferation of nuclear weapons is long-lasting and resolute. When the people of Palau adopted our Constitution in 1978, we became the first country in the world to become a constitutionally mandated nuclear-free country. Indeed, protecting our citizens from these horrific weapons of destruction is at the very heart and soul of our Constitution.

While not every country will sign the Treaty, the fact that the world's five recognized nuclear Powers — the United States, China, France, Russia and the United Kingdom — have agreed to abide by the terms of the Treaty and that the overwhelming majority of other nations, including the Republic of Palau, have also agreed to abide by its terms gives the citizens of my country and of every other nation on Earth the hope that one day we will be free from these catastrophic weapons of destruction and of the threat they pose to each of us and to our global environment.

Accordingly, I would like to thank all of those who helped bring the citizens of the world this Treaty, including the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban, Ambassador Ramaker of the Netherlands, and especially our close neighbour and great friend, the Government of Australia, which took the lead at the United Nations in making this Treaty a reality.

Another of my nation's primary concerns is the issue of how to protect the environment while providing sustainable economic development. This is a central issue for small island nations in particular and for other developing countries around the world. The Republic of Palau is therefore very pleased by the recognition and affirmation that human beings are at the centre of sustainable development and that they have the right to a healthy, productive and meaningful life in harmony with nature.

However, to make sure that this affirmation becomes a reality, action must be taken at all levels of government, in particular at the international level. To help every nation achieve this goal, developing countries, including small island nations, must be provided the necessary resources to enable them to implement the decisions and recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and other significant international conferences.

The Republic of Palau, a small island nation in the Pacific, cherishes its recognition as an independent country and greatly values its membership in the United Nations, which allows our voice to be heard on global issues such as the importance of freeing the world of nuclear weapons and protecting our global environment. We believe that perhaps the most critically important role of the United Nations is to provide a forum for nations large and small to discuss, debate and reach agreement on how best to serve economic, social, cultural and other humanitarian problems. Consequently, we believe that those countries which have made demonstrated efforts to advance regional and global peace, security and prosperity by establishing partnerships with other countries to further these causes have much to offer the United Nations as a whole and to its constituent Members individually.

In his inaugural speech to his country, United States President Bill Clinton pointed out that it is very likely that every problem we face has already been solved somewhere in the world. The challenge for us all is to communicate with each other so that we can discover those solutions. The United Nations clearly provides the forum for such dialogue and discovery to take place. The Republic of Palau believes that a greater number of voices invited to participate in these discussions can only lead to better solutions to the myriad global problems we all face.

The overwhelming support given to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty aptly demonstrates that, through many people working together, the cacophony of historically divergent voices can be harmonized for the benefit of all the peoples of all the nations on Earth.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*):
I now call on the Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Gabon, His Excellency Mr. Casimir Oye Mba.

Mr. Oye Mba (Gabon) (*interpretation from French*): On behalf of the Government of Gabon, it is an honour and a pleasure for me to address this eminent gathering.

Like previous speakers, I wish to recall that this meeting is being held just one year after the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. On that occasion, the balance sheet of our activities was examined many times. Fortunately, we are all agreed that we must seek together to find solutions to the major problems of the world, thereby preventing the outbreak of conflicts by establishing effective tools for negotiation and cooperation.

For all of us who participate and who believe in it, the United Nations is a valuable tool in the service of a common ideal. This has been reflected in some positive achievements achieved through pragmatism. The essential lesson to draw from our assessments is that, while it has not yet been able to meet all the challenges before it, the United Nations has nonetheless remained worthy of our hopes.

That is why delegations from nearly all nations annually take the opportunity offered by the regular session of the General Assembly to review the major concerns of the moment and to devise new goals.

But before touching on that subject, I wish to convey to Mr. Razali the sincere and warm congratulations of the delegation of Gabon on his brilliant election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session. It is a tribute to his country, Malaysia, and a recognition of his great personal qualities. He has our best wishes for success as he guides our proceedings.

I would also like to express our thanks and affection to his predecessor, Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Portugal, for the manner in which he carried out his term of office at the fiftieth session.

To Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, I reaffirm here the support of the Government of Gabon for all his work on the tasks of our Organization and for the competence and authority he has demonstrated in carrying out his mandate, which have coincided with the formulation of United Nations reform measures. He is a worthy son of Africa who has done honour to our Organization. As all member States of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) stated at the July 1996 Summit in Yaoundé, Gabon hopes that he will continue his work.

Building lasting and orderly peace based on the sincere and active cooperation of sovereign nations is one of the major missions of the United Nations. In our interdependent yet fragmented and multipolar world, the United Nations must play a more assertive role, particularly in the emergence of a new political and economic international order. It must help us to redress the general imbalance that has gripped the world since the end of the 1980s.

The sovereign equality of all States is among the main principles of our community of nations. Accordingly, we must cultivate flexible and dynamic thought that transcends relations of power and allows our Organization to achieve its goal of universality. This is the approach one must follow with regard to United Nations reform. Many countries have made contributions and many initiatives have been taken, as can be seen in the reports of the working groups established for that purpose. Gabon is gratified.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, El Hadj Omar Bongo, President of the Gabonese Republic, stated:

"The Security Council ... should be reformed in order to embrace the present dimensions of our Organization". (*Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Plenary Meetings, 36th meeting, p. 15*)

Restructuring the United Nations, we believe, should also include sweeping reform of its various subsidiary bodies, with a view to avoiding duplication in its functioning and programmes.

To sum up Gabon's position, we would like to say three things. First, it seems desirable and possible that the permanent membership of the Security Council could be increased without that body's becoming unwieldy. Secondly, and on this assumption, Africa should at least have one permanent seat. Thirdly, that permanent seat should be rotated among all African countries according to modalities to be defined later.

The complexity of this reform and its many political, economic and financial implications should not prevent us from laying out the configuration of international relations in the twenty-first century. Since a considerable number of Security Council decisions affect Africa, that region must not remain unrepresented on the Council, a body of paramount importance for the maintenance of

international peace and security. In the context of reform, Gabon subscribes to the objectives of rationalization and the clustering of activities whenever this enhances the effectiveness of the work of the United Nations.

We must attach priority importance to the establishment of a reformed international system that can preserve the world from murderous conflicts that disrupt the economies of the warring countries — a system that can fight underdevelopment, preserve the environment and wage a worldwide combat against pandemics such as AIDS and malaria — in other words, an international system that can break down the barriers to harmony and development in a richly diverse world. It is certainly a daunting task, but only through these efforts and under these conditions can our Organization secure lasting peace in the world.

Also high on the agenda is the resolution of problems relating to development and to social progress in a climate of peace, with full respect for fundamental human rights. Throughout the years differences of opinion have arisen with respect to these issues — particularly on how to resolve them. But given their decisive importance for our future and that of the United Nations, the international community must mobilize to act on them.

More generally speaking, the time has come for us to work together to restore to the United Nations its political dynamism and the means it still lacks. Clearly, then, we have a great deal to think about.

I should like now to touch on some matters of concern, such as peace and development — values and hopes that are shared by all.

Dialogue is a prerequisite for — though not a guarantee of — achieving peace, which is indispensable for human society to develop and flourish. I refer not only to the civilized dialogue of diplomatic relations — which, of course, is essential, but rather to a dialogue that could give rise to a culture — the culture of peace. Indeed, when everything is based on violence, dialogue is impossible. As Boris Pasternak wrote, "One cannot win others over by violence".

The Bantu people value dialogue. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, the President of Gabon, from this very rostrum, stated:

"I wish to propose that a real dialogue, a permanent dialogue, be established, under the auspices of the United Nations, between Heads of State and

Government of the South and those of the North. In that way, we may be able to find solutions to our common problems." (*Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Plenary Meetings, 36th meeting, p. 16*)

If each State were to refrain from attempting to impose its views on others, whatever the cost, and agreed that meeting the needs of peoples in a diverse and interdependent world requires dialogue and solidarity, then lasting peace and development can be achieved. That is why we must usher in a new era, the era of dialogue — genuine, honest and constructive dialogue.

We must continue to work together on an equal footing, with respect for humankind's interests and values. We must denounce and put an end to political violence, economic marginalization and social injustice. Dialogue must begin again: in Africa, in the Great Lakes region, in Liberia and Somalia; but also in the Middle East, in the former Yugoslavia, in Cyprus and in Chechnya — wherever it may be necessary.

Gabon is contributing, and will always contribute, to building the vast edifice of peace. Our duty, indeed our interest — in keeping with the letter and the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations — lies in undertaking this task. History has taught us that no country can hope to remain an island of peace in a sea of poverty, tension and war.

I believe that it is imperative to enhance the modalities of action available to the United Nations in the field of preventive diplomacy. In this connection, we must explore further proposals to equip the Secretariat with an Early Warning System aimed at preventing conflicts from erupting.

Our faith in dialogue and our relentless pursuit of peace are the reasons why Gabon, whenever asked, has always agreed to engage in mediation to resolve domestic conflicts in neighbouring countries, with the particular goal of paving the way for a lasting peace.

In January 1996 Gabon hosted a round table aimed at inter-Chadian reconciliation. In March 1996 we also enabled our Angolan brothers to strengthen the foundations for their future understanding, in the presence of several international observers. In both cases, the goal was to settle differences and clear up misunderstandings. What was important for Gabon and its President was to break through the wall of mistrust that barred the way to

reaching sincere and lasting agreements on solutions to such crises.

We cannot claim victory. The peace process in most countries is lengthy, and reversals, which can delay or jeopardize its conclusion, are frequent. For this reason, the international community must encourage and support those brothers at war who have opted for the path of dialogue to build peace. It must also promote goodwill, which will enable the warring parties to resolve their conflicts. Africa provides numerous examples of this.

The peace we seek requires not only dialogue but also other, sound initiatives such as disarmament and denuclearization. In this connection, we welcome the indefinite extension last year of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Likewise, we are proud of the fact that in March 1996, the African countries signed in Cairo the Pelindaba Text of the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty on the denuclearization of our continent. Finally, we warmly welcome the General Assembly's adoption, on 10 September 1996, of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. I signed it yesterday on behalf of my country.

The Central African States have decided to harmonize their policies on conventional disarmament, with a view to establishing a register of conventional arms. The success of this subregional undertaking will depend not only on the will of the States of the subregion, but also on the political support and assistance of all States Members of the United Nations.

Peace is also the result of confidence-building measures. The adoption of binding legal instruments and the effective use of preventive diplomacy will allow Africa to be exorcised of the spectre of death-dealing conflicts. The United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa is working towards that end. It just passed an important test with the solemn signature, on 8 July 1996, of a non-aggression pact during the thirty-second ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). This important preventive diplomacy measure shows that the Governments of the Central African countries intend to give pride of place to dialogue in the peaceful settlement of disputes among them.

The signing of this pact by the Heads of State of the subregion proves the importance and priority that the countries of Central Africa accord to the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa. The

Government of Gabon thanks the General Assembly for supporting that machinery through a trust fund, which generous donors, such as Japan, are beginning to pay into.

In 1974, during the special session of the United Nations General Assembly, President Bongo, using an example from nature, and according to a Gabonese maxim, stated that:

"When all the animals have been fed, calm reigns over the plains. (...) When the peoples of the earth have the vital minimum and maximum of dignity to which they are entitled, peace and harmony will finally have some likelihood of reigning on earth." (*Official Records of the General Assembly, sixth special session of the General Assembly, 2210th Plenary Meeting, para. 30*)

Development is certainly essential to peace. I would even go as far as to say that it is an intrinsic element of peace.

Although Africa has been wrestling with serious economic, social and political problems for over two decades, it is safe to say that henceforth it will vigorously and courageously undertake the reforms needed for its recovery.

However, African countries can make progress in this direction only if they are given adequate support by the international community, and by the developed countries in particular.

The goals of sustained economic growth, social development, environmental protection and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms set in the plans of action of several international conferences have sustainable development as their common denominator.

We are witnessing an era of radical change comparable to the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century. The globalization of the economy and of information and communications is changing relations among nations and increasing interdependence.

While these trends inspire great hope, they also raise numerous concerns because the impact of globalization varies from country to country. Those in Africa, in particular, where most come under the category of least developed countries, are facing a worrisome economic situation. Despite declarations and programmes of action, resources are not forthcoming.

International economic and financial relations are changing radically and quickly, as is clear from the events of recent years. The establishment of the International Seabed Authority which is well under way and which we welcome; the creation of the World Trade Organization in 1995, which is accelerating the easing of restrictions on free trade and its globalization; and the gradual establishment of large regional blocs in various parts of the world are all features of the new international order.

This situation, which is conducive to the emergence or consolidation of poles of integration, is far, on every score, from benefitting African States, whose income, which derives essentially from basic commodities, remains vulnerable to price fluctuations on the international market that are out of their control.

In addition, our continent's heavy debt burden means that our region is responsible for the greatest volume of reverse financial transfers due to debt repayment.

Structural adjustment programmes, although beneficial, mean that populations have to make enormous sacrifices. These programmes are now being followed in countries undergoing political reorganization. Because of the way democracy works, it is assumed that citizens support the proposed programmes. Inevitably, this increases the demands made by society. For Governments, it is truly difficult to find a balance between these contradictory requirements.

Of course, to remain credible partners we must abide by the requirements that go along with structural adjustment and the recovery of our economies. But we are duty-bound to include social needs when formulating and implementing reforms. The adoption of measures to promote sustained economic growth should not distract us from financing basic social and economic infrastructures such as roads, schools, hospitals, vocational training centres and so on.

This financing is essential if we are to improve our populations' living conditions and quality of life. As representatives know, the United Nations remains sensitive to this approach. Encouragement is needed, however, to ensure that this feeling is shared by its various agencies.

Governments have been called on to include poverty-eradication strategies in general, people-oriented development policies. How do we do this?

In establishing a favourable economic environment, the international community must support the efforts of all

countries that are willing to take this course of action. As 1996 marks the beginning of the United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, common objectives and the commitments entered into in the framework of overseas development assistance must now become reality.

However, since 1991, this assistance has declined in real terms. Private capital flows have been exclusively focused in some 20 developing countries. So far, there has been no upsurge in private investment in countries of the African Financial Community (CFA), despite the considerable devaluation of the CFA franc in January 1994.

We hope that the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa recently launched by the Secretary-General will ensure that the United Nations system as a whole, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, will help to mobilize the international community. Likewise, the international community must look into the crucial issue of debt, because it is jeopardizing the development of our countries.

My country believes that new solutions to deal with debt, its conversion or refashioning in the interests of economic and social development are essential to alleviate its heavy burden and to make it compatible with development, in the spirit of consensus prompted by the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

We reject and label as unjust any discrimination or classification between developing countries, as this usually makes Gabon ineligible for much of the assistance it requires for its development.

African peoples and Governments are not sitting idly by, waiting for assistance from the international community. They are tirelessly making tremendous efforts to overcome the crisis they face. I am pleased to mention in this respect the positive role that the Organization of African Unity is playing in backing our efforts.

OAU, in submitting the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community in June 1991 in Abuja to our Heads of State and Government for signature, understood that in the new international scenario, multilateral relations supersede bilateral relations.

The Abuja Agreement entered into force in May 1994, and the first ministerial session of its Economic and

Social Commission will be held next November in Abidjan. Subregional economic communities are becoming stronger all the time. Outside institutional frameworks, these economic blocs are implementing common programmes on currency, payment methods, business law, the development of scientific and technological capacity, energy resources, the environment and so on.

In the Central Africa subregion, our countries are involved also in subregional integration, which they see as a major component of development policy.

It was in this spirit that the thirtieth summit of the Central African Customs and Economic Union was convened in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 20 to 22 December 1994. The entry into force of customs reform on 1 July 1995 and the signing in July 1996 in Libreville of a text that establishes the Central African Economic and Monetary Community are designed to coordinate and strengthen the various regional integration efforts.

These are the main ideas that Gabon wishes, through me, to contribute to our consideration of the major concerns facing the international community today. Indeed, some of these questions are far from being resolved. We hope that discussion of these issues will continue, without getting bogged down and with the participation of all, in order to find solutions that can provide equitable and comprehensive guarantees for the interests of all of our countries. These interests are, basically, participation in forging a future for the United Nations; the maintenance and consolidation of peace; progress; and economic development.

Members may have noticed that I have dwelt on economic development concerns. I have done so not because I am biased, but because we in Gabon believe that true peace cannot exist amid poverty and destruction. As the Romans said, "*Si vis pacem, para bellum*" — "If you desire peace, prepare for war".

Today, on the threshold of the twenty-first century, and in both domestic and international contexts, we should say instead, "If you desire peace, prepare for development", because development and economic progress has truly become the face of peace.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.